

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Alexander Melville Bell, Eliza Symonds Bell, Carrie Bell, May 15, 1873, with transcript

3rd copy Copy of a letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to his parents & Carrie. 35 W. Newton Street, Boston, May 15th, 1873. Dear Papa, Mama and Carrie:

I am in great trouble just now, and don't know how to get out of it.

My head has been, and is, so strangely affected that I feel the less labor I give myself the better. I have not yet resumed work with private pupils, and shall not do so till next week — but there is one subject that presses so on my mind that I scarcely get any rest and I feel that it is not doing me any good.

Before I went to Canada, I entered into an arrangement to read a paper on V. S. before the Medical Society of Mass. and to illustrate with pupils. The Society meets in about a fortnight and the arrangements are all published. There is no way of getting out of it that I can see, although I feel that the anxiety about it is doing me no good. I cannot collect my thoughts on the subject, and I feel that I shall be in danger of making a fool of myself and bringing discredit on the system.

What has made me ten times more anxious than before is that some time ago, Dr. Cotting (who is one of the managing committee) came to me as the bearer of some suggestions from the Committee. You may have seen by the papers, that a very important trial is now going on in Boston, having for its object the expulsion of certain members of the Med. Soc. for practising Homeopathy. Strong feelings have been aroused, and it is known that some 2 members desire to disturb the meeting on the 4th of June by speaking on this subject. Unless this can be prevented, a stormy debate will ensue.

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Now the time for any member to address the meeting is — after the papers have been read, and before dinner which latter is always punctually at 1 o'clock.

My paper has been set last and the Committee want me to keep the platform till one o'clock . If any interruption is attempted it will be ruled down by the President. The subject on which I am to speak is the only one which can be condensed or enlarged according to the necessities of the case and it has therefore been put last.

The Committee suggest that instead of reading my paper (which will be published in the Medical Journal) — I should speak inpromptu, from notes, as I did at my last Exhibition and should enlarge or condense as circumstances should dictate. “If at a loss what to say then bring up pupils. You could have them up again and again — but keep on till one o'clock. ”

I forward letters received from Miss Hull, also a copy of “Whipple's Natural Alphabet.” Mr. Whipple came to Boston to see me, and explain about his alphabet. He stated that he believed the idea to have originated with himself — and spoke of notes he had as far back as 1869. I told him of your lectures in America about that time, and suggested that some one who had heard you had given him the idea. He admitted that this might be the case but thought he was unconscious of it. The alphabet has not been 3 patented nor copyrighted nor sent to Vienna. The name “Whipple's Natural Alphabet” has been copyrighted. Mr. Whipple is too poor to go to any expense about his system.

He rudely carved his symbols on wood blocks, and printed a few copies for his own pupils and for personal friends.

Has not sent copies to any Institute nor to the Annals. I am inclined to think Mr. Whipple is honest in all he says and I have told him that I have nothing but the most friendly feelings towards him and his grandfather, old Mr. Whipple, was the first person in America who attempted to teach speech to the deaf. I said that “so long as my father's claim to be the

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originator of the idea of representing sounds by characters pictorial of parts of the mouth and of their modes of action is not disputed," I shall take a friendly interest in his work.

I enclose a letter received from Mr. Whipple and reply to it. You will see how ignorant Mr. Whipple has been of the true formation of sounds — on inspection of his alphabet.

Mr. J. Oakley Coles of England has discovered a new and ingenious way of examining the mechanism of speech. He has not advanced the subject a hair's breadth but he has given a new method of self examination which may ultimately produce good fruit. He paints over the whole of his palate, upper teeth, with a mixture of gum and flour. He then articulates a sound. Wherever the tongue has come into contact the flour is removed from the palate, and adheres to the tongue. He then marks with red paint on an engraving of the upper jaw, the parts from which the flour has been removed. On the pict. of the lower jaw and tongue, he marks in a circular way the parts to which the flour adheres. So with the lips.

In the transact. of the Odontological Society of Great Britain is published a series of 24 plates illustrating the plan. Mr. Coles' experiments have been conducted with no proper care and the results though very suggestive are exceedingly defective. I shall experiment at once on this plan, and I think that, with proper care, very striking results may be obtained.

I have had four new applications. Two for stammering, one for elocution, and one for V. S.

The Catholic Institution in Buffalo will, in a few days, send down a Sister of Mercy to study V. S. Mr. Cox has not yet come forward. If I feel well enough I shall be in full work again next week with the following private pupils. 1. Miss Redden, 2. Miss. Adams, 3. Miss Drew, 4. Theodore Bullard, 5. Miss Walker (stam.), 6. Mrs. Jones (stam.), 7. Mr. Kidder (eloc.), 8. Sister Mary Ann (V. S.).

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Do not think that my silence has been caused either by indifference or severe sickness. I would be pretty well now, but for those horrid debilitating headaches, which go far to make my life miserable.

A Medical gentleman, Dr. Perkins, that I met in Haverhill, said that I was suffering from spinal neuralgia — a very common affection of the spinal chord. He recommended mental rest, and 5 strengthening tonics such as Dr. Corson advised. I am very fortunate in having good friends here. Mr. and Mrs. Richards, especially will always hold a good place in my affections from their kindness and attention. I shall write again — tomorrow probably — about Miss Hull's proposal.

With much love, Aleck.